New research aimed at improving practical skills of our BVSc graduates

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The findings of a new research article published in the April edition of the Journal of Veterinary Medical Education form part of the Faculty's drive to improve practical skills training of our BVSc graduates in those skills required by their employers, particularly in production animal practice. Pregnancy diagnoses in cows make up a significant proportion of the work done by rural veterinary practitioners, and it is essential that graduates have some level of accuracy in pregnancy diagnosis when they enter the world of work.

According to Prof Dietmar Holm, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty, the first step to initiate the research was to establish an accurate way of measuring student pregnancy diagnosis (PD) skill level. Dr Annett Annandale, extraordinary lecturer in the Faculty and first author of the paper, entitled "Influence of an Exercise Program, Muscle Strength, Proprioception, and Arm Length on Veterinary Students' Bovine Pregnancy Diagnosis Accuracy", established the Onderstepoort PD Challenge for this purpose, which became an annual event.

Dr Annandale and the team then proceeded to determine which factors influence a student's accuracy. One of the most important factors found to be influencing student pregnancy diagnosis accuracy was grip strength. The research team went one step further, to see if they can improve pregnancy diagnosis accuracy by means of doing an exercise programme aimed at improving grip strength. "We were very excited to find that the exercise programme not only improved grip strength, but also pregnancy diagnoses by the students subject to the exercise programme, compared to a control group", Prof Holm says.

"These research findings mean that we can inform students of their grip strength and the influence it may have on their veterinary skills, and, in doing so, help them with an exercise programme to improve their skill level", he says.

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-Author Chris van Blerk

-Published by Chris van Blerk